TAKING AN OATH

BY

"KISSING THE BOOK,"

Anti-Scriptural and Idolatrous.

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In this tract, I shall take for granted that swearing, on necessary and important occasions, is warranted by the Word of God, and confine my observations exclusively to the form in which oaths are usually administered and taken.

I shall endeavour to show, in the subsequent remarks, that the common manner of swearing, by kissing the book with a cross upon it, is both anti-Scriptural and idolatrous.

That the customary form of appealing to the Deity by kissing a book with a cross upon it on being adjured is contrary to the Word of God, will appear from the several portions of Scripture which refer to the form of adjuration sanctioned and practised by God himself. In Gen. xiv. 22, we are told that Abraham said to the King of Sodom, "I have lifted up mine hand to the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth." The phrase, "I have lifted up mine hand," in this place, is equivalent to "I have sworn." This interpretation is confirmed by Ex. vi. 8, where God is said to swear to Abraham. The language in the original, rendered in the English version "I did swear," is "I lifted up my hand," (*nasathi eth yadi*). In Numb. xiv. 30, the phrase "I sware," in the authorised translation, is, in the original, "I lifted up my hand" (*nasathi eth yadi.*) These passages are sufficient to show that lifting up the hand and taking an oath, in Biblical usage, were understood to signify the same thing, the form in which the oath was taken being put to denote the oath itself. This fact proves most satisfactorily that lifting up the hand was the patriarchal and Scriptural mode of taking an oath. In Dan. xii. 7, it is said—"I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever." Both the hands were not lifted up together when this oath was taken, as a form of adjuration different from that of elevating one of the hands; but they were both lifted up at this time (perhaps in succession), because the oath was taken to two separate parties, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side of the river. To signify that the oath was taken to the angel on the right side of the river, the man on the river elevated his right hand, and to show that it was taken to the angel on the left side, he lifted up his left hand. This passage, then, furnishes us with another example of the uniform practice of elevating the hand on taking an oath. In Psalm cxliv. 8, it is said, their "right hand is a right hand of falsehood," because the right hand was employed in making solemn appeals to Deity. In Deut. xxxii. 39, 40, Jehovah himself is represented as swearing by the elevation of

His hand. The language reads thus—"See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with me: I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever." Ezekiel xx. 5 reads thus—"And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the Land of Egypt, saying, I am the Lord your God." In Isaiah lxii. 8, it is said, "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, saying, I will no longer give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies, and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured." This Old Testament usage is introduced into the New Testament economy, as we are informed in Rev. x. 5, 6, where the Apostle John represents the Angel (Christ) as lifting up His right hand, and swearing by Him that liveth for ever and ever. These portions of the Word of God incontestably prove that elevating the hand on taking an oath, as signifying an appeal to Jehovah, is the uniform practice recognised in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The custom, therefore, of swearing, by kissing the book with a cross upon it, is a flat contradiction to the teaching of the Bible on this matter.

The case of Abraham requiring his servant to put his hand under his thigh is regarded by some, without due consideration, as a form of swearing. In Gen. xxiv. 2, 9, it is said that Abraham directed his servant to put his hand under his thigh, and to swear to him. It cannot, however, be satisfactorily proved from this passage that putting the hand under the thigh was the form in which the oath was administered by Abraham to his servant. There is no evidence that putting the hand under the thigh ever was a form of adjuration among any known ancient people. The act of putting the hand under the thigh might have been an accompaniment of the oath, and intended to show the submissiveness and fidelity of the servant to his master, and not the form in which the oath was administered; or it might have been ceremonial, and designed to signify that the future Messiah was to descend from the Father of the Faithful. At any rate, there is so much obscurity hanging over the phrase, that it cannot be adduced in evidence as a form of taking an oath. In Gen. xlvii. 29, the only other place where the same phrase is employed, we are told that Israel requested his son Joseph to put his hand under his thigh, and, in the thirty-first verse, that he said, "Swear unto me." From the perusal of the whole of this narrative, it would appear that putting the hand under the thigh and swearing were disconnected in point of time, and that putting the hand under the thigh could not be the form in which the oath was taken. It therefore follows from these considerations, that there is but one form of adjuration sanctioned in the Bible—namely, that of lifting up the hand, as denoting an appeal to God. But, for the sake of illustration, let us suppose that there are several forms of swearing sanctioned in Scripture, it is not a legitimate inference which some would deduce from this concession, that the form in which an oath is taken is of little or no importance. Why should Christians supersede all these forms if they are recorded in the Bible, none of which can be idolatrous, and adopt one taken from Heathen and Popish idolatry? Protestants profess to be regulated exclusively in all their religious sentiments and usages by the Word of God. Why, then, should they, in making a solemn appeal to God on oath, adopt a form that is directly contrary to Scripture? Protestants must either abandon their claims of being guided in all matters connected

with religion by the Bible, or they must give up the present custom of swearing, by kissing the book with a cross upon it.

II. Kissing the book with a cross upon it, on taking an oath, is idolatrous, as well as anti-Scriptural.

Before entering upon the particular discussion of this part of our subject, it will be necessary to show that the words kiss, bow, and kneel, are used in Scripture both in a civil and religious acceptation. It is important to keep this distinction in mind, inasmuch as we are sometimes asked, does a man pay religious worship to every friend that he bows to or kisses. In 1 Samuel x. 1, the word kiss is used in a civil sense, where Samuel is said to kiss Saul. The word bow is taken in a civil acceptation in Gen. xxiii. 7, where we are told that Abraham bowed to the children of Heth. (See also Gen. xxvii. 29; Gen. xxxvii. 10.) The word worship is employed in a civil sense in Matt. xviii. 26, where the servant is said to worship his master. (See also Rev. iii. 9, and xiii. 14, 15.) The term kneel is used in a civil acceptation in Matt. xxvii. 29; Mark x. 17; Mark i. 40. Kneeling was a customary mode of paying civil respect to kings in ancient times. If we kiss a friend, or bow to him in the performance of the civilities of life, we pay him civil, but not religious worship or veneration. But if, in the performance of an act of religious devotion, we bow to any visible object, or kiss any likeness of anything either in heaven above or in the earth beneath, or if we kneel before it, we pay that object Divine honour, according to the Scriptural use of these terms, when employed in their religious acceptation. That bowing and kneeling in the presence of Deity are forms of giving Him religious worship, is evident from several portions of the Word of God. In Rom. xiv. 11, it is said, "As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me." In Phil. ii. 10, we are told that every knee shall bow to Jesus, of things in heaven, and things on the earth. In Ephes. iii. 14, Paul says, "For this cause I bow my knee unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In Ex. xx. 5, it is said, "Thou shalt not bow down to them"—that is, to images—because that would be paying them religious worship. In 2 Chron. xxix. 29, it is said, "When they had made an end of offering, the king, and all that were present with him, bowed themselves and worshipped." In this tract, however, we are especially required to prove that kissing any visible object or likeness, in performing an act of devotion, is a form of paying that object religious worship, and therefore idolatrous. This can be proved as clearly as any mathematical demonstration from several passages of the inspired volume. In Job. xxxi. 26, 27, 28, it is said, "If I beheld the sun when he shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge: for I should have denied the God that is above." In this language we are told that kissing the hand to the sun or moon is a form of worshipping it. Hosea xiii. 2, "And now they sin more and more, and make to themselves molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves"—that is, worship the calves. In 1 Kings xix. 18, it is said, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him"—that is, worshipped him. (See also Rom. xi. 4.) Minutius Felix says, "that as Cecilius passed before the statue of Serapis, he kissed his hand toward the statue," as signifying that he paid it religious worship. In Ps. ii. 12, it is said, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry"—that is,

worship the Son with religious worship. It is clear from these several passages of God's Word, that kissing any visible object, in the performance of an act of devotion, is a form of paying that object religious worship, and consequently idolatrous. To kiss a book with a cross upon it, on taking an oath, is to worship the book and the cross, at least in form, and therefore an act of idolatry. It is not a sufficient apology for kissing the book when taking an oath that it is Jehovah that is the principal object of worship. It is conceded that Jehovah is the supreme object of worship, but it must also be acknowledged that the cross and the book are likewise worshipped. The very same apology that is made for kissing the book might be made for the whole of the image-worship of Pagans and Romanists; for in neither case is the image worshipped as God. The heathen never imagined that an image was a deity. We are not to suppose that we can escape the charge of idolatry because the true God is worshipped when we worship Him through the medium of an image; for the Scriptures give the name of idolatry to the worship of Jehovah, if offered to Him through the intervention of an idol. This is evident from the case of the golden calf, recorded in Ex. xxxii. 1, 7. In the fourth verse, the people are represented as saying, after the golden calf was formed, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." The word in the original rendered gods is the usual plural for god; and the phrase, "these be thy gods," ought to have been translated in the singular number, "this is thy god." That this is the proper rendering is evident from the fact that Aaron made but one calf, as well as from Nehemiah ix. 18, where we have an account of the same occurrence, and the original is translated, "this is thy God," although the word for God is plural there, as well as in Exodus. The phrase, "this is thy god," is put by metonymy, "for this is a symbol of thy god," as we say of a picture, this is my father, and that is my mother. No one can imagine that the Israelites believed that the golden calf was the God that wrought the miracles in Egypt. No people were ever so besotted as to think that an image or symbol was a deity. The Israelites on this occasion must have regarded the golden calf as an emblem or representation of their God, and as intended to secure His presence among them. In confirmation of this opinion, we are informed that the feast was appointed to the Lord (Jehovah), the proper rites employed in true worship were observed, for they brought, as we are told in verses 6 and 7, burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. Hence it is evident that Aaron intended that Jehovah was to be worshipped through the medium of the golden calf, the way that Micah and his mother (Judges xvii. 3) worshipped the true God, through the medium of a graven image. In Ps. cvi. 19–24, it is said that the Israelites made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image, not as God, for no people ever believed that an image was a deity. The heathen took good care to guard themselves against the charge of worshipping an image as God. On this subject Herodatus says, *ευχομενοι τω θεω του αν ἡ το θηριον*, praying to the god of whom the animal was a symbol or representation. It was supposed, however, by the heathen, that the worship paid to the image drew down into it the propitious presence of the god whom it represented. Stilpo was banished from Athens for saying that the statue of Minerva was nothing but a block of marble. The crime, then, of which the Israelites were guilty, was not an abandonment of the worship of their own God, but the worshipping of Him through the medium of an image. When we appeal to God, on being adjured, through the me-

dium of a book and a cross, we are chargeable with idolatry, because we worship Jehovah by means of an image. In 1 Cor. x. 7, the Apostle Paul calls the worship which the Israelites paid to the true God, through the medium of the golden calf, idolatry—"Neither," says he, "be ye idolaters, as were some of them; for they sat down to eat and to drink, and they rose up to play," alluding to the case of the golden calf. In 1 Kings xii. 26–30, we are told that Jeroboam set up calves in Dan and Bethel, as symbols of the true God, and through which He was to be worshipped; and in the 30th verse, it is said, "the people went to worship *before the One*, even unto Dan"—that is, to worship Jehovah before it. To worship God in conjunction with, or through the medium of, any visible object, is idolatry. To kiss a book and a cross, when appealing to God on oath, is worshipping Jehovah through the medium of a symbol or image, and therefore idolatrous. My dearly beloved brethren, flee from idolatry—the judgments of God are denounced against it.

I. It is said, in opposition to the preceding reasoning, that the cross and the book are not intended to be worshipped when kissed on taking an oath. Granting that they are not intended to be worshipped by Protestants, why should a Christian go through the very same form that he would be required to go through if he wished to show the public that he intended to worship them? Is there any other way that a man could more effectually demonstrate that he intended to worship a cross and a book than by kissing them when making a solemn appeal to God on oath? Why should a man adopt an idolatrous form on being adjured if he does not intend to be an idolater? If any one shall prove to me that the usual form of adjuration is not idolatrous, I shall undertake to prove that the image-worship of Romanists is not idolatrous. In 1 John v. 21, the beloved apostle says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols;" and in 1 Cor. x. 14, the Apostle Paul says, "My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." But surely no one will say that kissing a book with a cross upon it is fleeing from idolatry; for if it is not idolatry, it is surely very like it.

II. It is objected to the line of argument adopted in this tract, that one form of swearing is as good as another, and that the manner in which an oath is taken is of no importance. This is an objection made in total ignorance of the teaching of the Bible. In order to worship God acceptably, both the matter and manner of our worship must be in accordance with His revealed will. In the Scriptures we are not only taught the proper object of religious veneration, but also the manner in which Jehovah ought to be worshipped. The first commandment teaches us the proper object of religious adoration, and the second the manner in which we ar to worship God. On the principle that manner is of no importance, the Hebrew youths might have bowed to Nebuchadnezzar's image, and worshipped God in mind at the same time; or a man might bow in the house of Rimmon, and worship God in spirit and in truth. This is a mode of procedure which the Bible nowhere recognises; no man is at liberty to think right and to act wrong—to lead men, by his external demeanour, to believe that he is an idolater, while he is a worshipper of the only wise, living, and true God in intention.

III. It is said, in favour of kissing the book on taking an oath, that it is the truth which the book contains that is regarded. But may it not be fairly asked, is there no way of expressing our attachment to the truth of the Bible but by kissing the book with a cross upon it? Where are we commanded in Scripture to worship truth, or to express our regard for the

Bible by kissing the book with the cross upon it, on being adjured? We are commanded to worship God only, and we are prohibited from even appearing to worship any likeness of anything in conjunction with the Divine being. (See Matt. iv. 9, 10; 1 Sam. vii. 3; Deut. x. 20; Joshua xxiv. 14; Isaiah xlv. 23; Phil. ii. 10; Ephes. iii. 14.) The same apology that is made in favour of kissing the book on being adjured might be made in favour of Romish and heathen idolatry. The cross is worshipped by Romanists, not simply as a cross, but as a symbol of Christian truth. Suppose the ministers of the several denominations of Protestants were to direct their hearers on the Lord's-day, when engaging in prayer, in order to give solemnity and effect to their devotion, to bow to a Bible with a cross upon it, elevated in some conspicuous place in their different churches; or suppose that each individual, in their several congregations, was required to kiss his Bible with a cross upon it at the commencement of prayer, for the purpose of making his devotion more acceptable in the sight of God. What a sensation would be produced! Yet these very same persons walk out of the church into the court of justice, and they do the very same thing cordially that they would regard with the greatest indignation and abhorrence if they were required to do it in a place of worship. Habit appears to reconcile people to anything. My dearly beloved brethren, flee from idolatry!

ANNO PRIMO & SECUNDO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

CAP. CV.

An Act to Remove Doubts as to the Validity of certain Oaths.

14*th August* 1838.

Be it declared and enacted by the Queen's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that in all cases in which an oath may lawfully be and shall have been administered to any person, either as a juryman or a witness, or a deponent in any proceeding, civil or criminal, in any court of law or equity in the United Kingdom, or on appointment to any office or employment, or on any occasion whatever, such person is bound by the oath administered, provided the same shall have been administered in such form and with such ceremonies as such person may declare to be binding; and every such person in case of wilful false swearing may be convicted of the crime of perjury in the same manner as if the oath had been administered in the form and with the ceremonies most commonly adopted.

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